

## STORIES of New Jersey

When war came, John Hart was a marked man. As the British penetrated New Jersey, he led the governing body from Princeton to Burlington to Pittston and finally to Haddonfield, where it was dissolved.

His wife ill and his property devastated, Hart fled for his life to a hidden spot, difficult of access, in the Sourland Mountains. For many weeks he lived the life of a hunted animal sheltered by a pile of rocks, now called the "Stone House." His dog was his only companion, and his only contact with the outside world was his Negro servant, Jack, who visited the mountain hideout occasionally.

Broken in health by the ordeal of the mountains and grief-stricken by the death of his wife, Hart nevertheless reconvened the legislature when Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton made it possible for him to return home. At the meeting in Trenton January 1777, he was re-elected speaker. For a year and a half Hart struggled against collapse to serve his country. Then on May 11, 1779 he died at his home in Hopewell.

Hart was buried in the private cemetery of a neighbor, John P. Hunt, a few miles from his home. A plain stone lay above his grave, but one of the townspeople put a secret mark on it which 85 years later, when the legislature wished to honor Hart, served as identification. The Signer's remains were then removed to the graveyard of the Baptist Church in Hopewell, and over the new burial place was erected the first monument ever to be dedicated by the State to an outstanding citizen.

In the Statehouse at Trenton hangs a picture which is claimed to be of John Hart. It shows a handsome young man with long, curly black hair reaching to his shoulders. An account written by a contemporary describes Hart as a tall man with a dark complexion, blue eyes and "black to very black hair." The Hopewell Museum officials hardly agree with this description, for among their exhibits is a lock of hair which they say is John Hart's. It is red.

